

Son of Mine

by
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CHARACTERS

Sam Callum, 30s

Eric Grady, 30s

Babacar Niang, 30s

Paul Callum, 50s

Doctor

“CRITICAL CONDITION”

An eerie quiet in the hospital waiting room.

Sitting stoically in a chair is Babacar Niang, an imposing Senegalese man, with a string of prayer beads in his fist.

Eric Grady, a nervous bookish man, paces nearby. He and Babacar are aware of each other but don't interact.

The noise of doctors somewhere down the hall. Both men immediately turn to look but both sigh with a mixture of disappointment and relief when there is nothing to see.

They meet eyes for a moment, then look away.

BABACAR

Three hours.

ERIC

What?

BABACAR

They said it would be at least three hours.

ERIC

...

BABACAR

In surgery.

Eric looks at Babacar, confused, but he doesn't look back.

After a moment, Eric crosses closer to the hallway to get a closer look.

ERIC

They're supposed to be giving updates.

BABACAR

(Nods.)

If his condition changes.

ERIC

I'm sorry, did you overhear / or something?

BABACAR

This can be good. No change can be a good thing.

ERIC

He's unconscious.

BABACAR

He is *alive*.

Eric nods through the confusion, feeling reassured in spite of himself.

ERIC

Are you here for...

BABACAR

My son.

ERIC

God, I'm sorry, it's...Mine was in an accident, on his bike, hit by a car, actually, which we warned him about a hundred times. Not that it matters at this point, but it just keeps coming into my head, how often we had that conversation. Check the turn lanes, wear your helmet...

BABACAR

It is amazing what brain surgeons can do.

ERIC

How much did you overhear?

BABACAR

They sounded hopeful.

ERIC

I should leave you alone, I'm sorry. You've got your own stuff to / worry about.

BABACAR

I think he will be fine.

ERIC

Well, say a little prayer for him.

(Re: the beads.)

That's what you're uh... Those are for...

BABACAR

Prayer, you're right.

ERIC

I'm kidding, of course. Some stranger's kid is the furthest thing from your mind right now, I don't blame you. But, hey, if you can spare one bead for a desperate agnostic father...

BABACAR

(Offers the beads.)

Would you like to try?

ERIC

God, I'm the worst, just ignore me. I make these stupid jokes when I'm nervous.

BABACAR

I wasn't joking.

ERIC

No, I know, it's all very serious, I just, uh...just...

Eric laughs nervously, then just like that he is crying.

Babacar stands but maintains a respectful distance.

I'm sorry.

BABACAR

You should sit.

ERIC

It's better if I can keep moving, I get this pent-up energy and I just have to...

BABACAR

You've been through this before.

ERIC

Not like this. No, not...

Eric shakes his head, trying to compose himself.

Babacar puts an arm around him, leads him to sit.

BABACAR

Here. Breathe.

ERIC

I'm fine.

BABACAR

You are better than fine. You are strong.

ERIC

Jesus, what are you, crisis management?

Babacar pulls a bottle of water from his bag, offers it to Eric.

BABACAR

Here. Drink slowly.

ERIC

You really don't have / to do this.

BABACAR

Less talking. Drink.

Eric takes a drink of water.

ERIC

"Less talking." I should make that my mantra.

He drink again, drains half of the bottle as Babacar watches.

Eric takes a deep breath, sits quietly.

BABACAR

"Verily, with every difficulty there is relief."

ERIC

That's beautiful.

(Beat.)

You *aren't*, right?

BABACAR

What?

ERIC

Crisis management. The guy the hospital sends to calm down the, you know, distraught parents in the / waiting room.

BABACAR

No no.

ERIC

I mean, that wouldn't bode well.

Eric goes to hand the water back to Babacar.

You can have it.

ERIC

I'll replace it, there's a vending machine / down the hall.

BABACAR

You don't need to / do that.

ERIC

The walk will be good for me.

BABACAR

I am fasting, until sundown. It will be hours before I'm even thinking of water. And by that time the doctors will be here with their good news.

ERIC

(Smiles finally.)

Right.

Eric is calm for a moment. Babacar watches him.

Is *your* son in surgery?

BABACAR

He is.

ERIC

Serious?

BABACAR

That's what they say.

ERIC

Feel free to shut me up any time.

BABACAR

He was in an accident.

ERIC

Jesus, it's a wonder we even let these kids out of the house. Just accident-prone as all get-out. Mine's fourteen and he's constantly knocking stuff over and banging his elbows into door frames...

BABACAR

Really?

ERIC

I mean, he doesn't quite know what to do with his body, you know? He had this growth spurt, early for his age, and it's like he's still getting used to it, like a new car, like how wide he has to take the turns and all that.

BABACAR

(Almost smiling.)

He's tall.

ERIC

Getting there, yeah. He's a *giant* if you ask the other kids in his class, just dominates in basketball, even *more* evidence I'm not his biological dad. This kid couldn't pick his birth father out of a lineup, probably, but you'd be safe guessing it's the tallest guy in the bunch.

(Off his look.)

You alright?

BABACAR

He likes basketball?

ERIC

Sure, I mean, he likes to be outside, active.

BABACAR

I played soccer when I was his age.

ERIC

And now does your son play?

BABACAR

I...I don't know.

ERIC

Well. I mean, you should teach him. I taught Malik how to do a layup.

BABACAR

Oh.

ERIC

And then, obviously, he taught me how do a layup *correctly*.

BABACAR

You smile when you say his name.

ERIC

Not sure I'm really capable of smiling / right now.

BABACAR

You are a good father.

ERIC

Well, I wouldn't say...I'm *doing my best*. Aren't we all? I mean, isn't that all we can say for sure?

BABACAR

Not every man can say it.

ERIC

I can, I guess. I can say that much.

BABACAR

You love your son. You would do anything for him.

ERIC

Is that a question?

BABACAR

I would like to hear you say it. Please.

Babacar looks intently at Eric, who uncomfortably goes on.

ERIC

...I love him.

Good.

BABACAR

ERIC

And obviously, yes, I...I would do anything for...

Eric is looking down the hall again, emotion creeping into his voice.

Babacar takes a long look at Eric.

BABACAR

Eric Hopper.

ERIC

What?

BABACAR

That is your name, / isn't it?

ERIC

How did you...

BABACAR

You are a good man.

Babacar rises to go.

And I will pray for the boy.

ERIC

Where are you going?

BABACAR

I should not be here. Not today, not like this.

ERIC

Wait, I don't / understand.

BABACAR

They made a mistake, even telling me he was here.

ERIC

You have to stay, though, if your son's in there.

BABACAR

And why should I? The boy could not “pick me out of a lineup.”

Eric stops, catches Babacar’s meaning. The two men stare at each other, a look of disbelief coming to Eric’s face.

ERIC

Oh my god.

BABACAR

The woman at the agency, she called me / by mistake.

ERIC

Oh my god, / oh my *god*.

BABACAR

I thought it was a miracle. That is *my* mistake, looking for miracles where they have no business.

ERIC

You’re...

BABACAR

I am leaving, I said.

ERIC

I’m so sorry.

BABACAR

You like to apologize.

ERIC

Well, I don’t necessarily *like* it. Did you tell the doctors who you are?

BABACAR

No one knows. And no one will know I am gone.

ERIC

...

BABACAR

He will be alright.

Babacar goes to leave again but Eric calls after him.

Wait.

ERIC

Babacar stops.

He's who you're praying for.

BABACAR

He doesn't need the prayers of a man like me.

ERIC

Well, maybe *I* do, yeah? Maybe you could just stay a few more minutes, at least until...

Before Eric can finish, a voice calls from down the hall.

SAM

(Off.)

Eric?!

Sam runs on, nearly collides with Babacar. Sam is louder than Eric, makes his presence known.

Oh god, / sorry.

ERIC

Careful.

Sam rushes to Eric, frantic.

SAM

Where is he?

ERIC

They have him / in surgery.

SAM

I got your message, I was / in a meeting.

ERIC

He's in surgery, Sam.

SAM

Oh god, / oh god.

ERIC

They'll update us / when they know something.

SAM

Is it serious? Did they say / it's serious?

ERIC

We don't know anything. *Hey.*

Eric puts a hand on Sam, who instantly calms down.

Sam nods, stares into Eric's eyes for a moment.

Babacar looks on uncomfortably.

SAM

(Low, to Eric.)

Did you see him?

ERIC

No.

SAM

What about the doctor, how did he look?

ERIC

I don't know...*Competent.*

BABACAR

Hopeful.

Sam turns, looks at Babacar suspiciously.

SAM

I'm sorry, do we...

(To Eric.)

Do we know him?

ERIC

He's keeping me company.

SAM

And talking to Malik's doctors?

BABACAR

I only overheard.

ERIC

(To Sam.)

They said they're doing everything they can for him.

SAM

They always say that.

(Looks around.)

Is there a nurse, or...I should tell them I'm here.

ERIC

Tell who?

SAM

They like to know, who from the family / is here.

ERIC

I said you were on your way.

SAM

They don't tell you *shit* unless you bug them, you know?

ERIC

I handled it.

A tense moment passes between Sam and Eric. Sam steps away and Eric takes a breath to calm himself.

BABACAR

He has a subdural hematoma. Bleeding in the brain.

SAM

Okay, really?

ERIC

That's true.

SAM

(Re: Babacar.)

Did someone give this guy his *chart*?

ERIC

He's just *been here*.

SAM

My phone was off, Jesus Christ, do you think I would've / taken this long if I knew?

ERIC

I wasn't pointing fingers, Sam.

BABACAR

It is a risky surgery but they are confident / it will stop the bleeding.

SAM

Okay, kind stranger, I think we can take it / from here.

ERIC

Sam, don't.

SAM

(To Babacar.)

It's just, we're worried about our son.

BABACAR

Your son.

ERIC

Yes. This is Sam, my husband.

BABACAR

Husband.

SAM

There's a fucking echo in here.

ERIC

(To Babacar.)

Maybe it would be better if you gave us some time.

BABACAR

I didn't know.

SAM

Didn't know what?

ERIC

Maybe we all just need to / calm down.

BABACAR

You two are raising the boy together.

SAM

Listen, I really don't have the emotional energy to go all Harvey Milk / on your ass.

ERIC

Please god, *none* of us has / the energy for that.

SAM

(Going on, to Babacar.)

But I think we've got this covered. Thank you. For eavesdropping.

Babacar glares at Sam, who turns back to Eric.

Over the following, Babacar returns slowly to his seat.

(To Eric.)

Listen, you're gonna say it's too early but I don't think we should keep him at this hospital.

ERIC

Sam, / not the time.

SAM

I have an ex, let me finish, he plays golf with a guy on the board of General Presbyterian.

ERIC

We can talk about this later.

SAM

I'll just make the call, okay?

ERIC

Can we wait and see if Malik...

SAM

If he *what*, if he *makes it*?

ERIC

I didn't say that.

SAM

What did they say, like, *exactly* what did the / doctor say?

ERIC

What I told you, they're doing everything / they can.

SAM

Eric, tell me he's gonna be okay!

Eric leads Sam to the chairs.

ERIC

Come here, come on. We have to stay positive, what's that thing you always say?

SAM

Where's our boy, Eric?

ERIC

Here, sit down. Drink something...

Sam sits. Eric fetches him the water bottle and Sam drinks it over the following.

They said he got here in time for them to operate, there's still things they can do, alright?
Is that better?

Sam drinks some more, looks over at Babacar whose head is bowed in prayer again.

Sam?

SAM

(Re: Babacar and his prayer beads)

There's probably a quiet place around here.

ERIC

Sam.

SAM

Hospitals are set up with that kind of thing, chapels and / whatever.

ERIC

It's fine.

SAM

I'm just trying to be considerate. We can't promise to be quiet with everything that's going on.

ERIC

He doesn't mind.

SAM

I'm not just gonna sit here and be *quiet* when my son is in *brain surgery*.

BABACAR

(Without looking up.)

You are welcome. For the water.

Sam caps the bottle, puts it down. He turns to Eric.

SAM

Eric. What's going on?

Eric considers this, looks at Babacar, then back at Eric.
He takes his hand.

A doctor enters with a medical chart in hand.

DOCTOR

I need to speak with Malik Niang's father.

Eric, Sam, and Babacar all stand.